



Nonviolent Approach to Justifying Home Economics

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Abstract

People can respond to injustice and conflict using either violence or nonviolence. Violence is power over people; non-violence is power from within. Home economics has long faced injustice in the form of marginalization, disrespect, belittlement, and closures. The culprit is unchallenged ideologies perpetuated by our opponents. This paper queries what would justifying (doing right by) home economics look like from a nonviolence perspective? The paper addresses (a) core aspects of nonviolence (e.g., Satyagraha [inner power], the Truth, self-discipline, suffering, no harm, and resistance); (b) nonviolent versus violent principles; and (c) nonviolent right actions (strategies). Threaded throughout are examples of how the profession can benefit if individual home economic practitioners learned and embraced this philosophy. Exposing the ideologies exposes the oppression. Through offering the Satyagraha, practitioners can address our oppression by working hand in hand with our opponents. A greater shared Truth about home economics can ultimately be observed. Using nonviolence, justice can prevail.

KEYWORDS: HOME ECONOMICS, NONVIOLENCE, SATYAGRAHA, JUSTICE, RESISTANCE, RIGHT ACTIONS

Introduction

In an earlier article, I asserted that the profession has been fighting the wrong war when justifying (doing right by) home economics. I concluded with this sentiment: “I make no apologies for resorting to this war-based message—we are fighting the wrong war. We need to shun the war of attrition and fight a war of ideologies—a war of ideas about home economics” (McGregor, 2022, p. 42). In that same article, I cited Childress (2001) who commented on the moral dilemma of using violent war metaphors to make political points. What would justifying home economics look like from a Gandhian nonviolent perspective?

Because “nonviolence has yet to make its way into the prevailing worldview” (Nagler, 2014, p. 4) and because “at this time most people do not understand the dynamics of nonviolence fully, if at all” (p. 3), this paper strives to bring the nonviolence philosophy to the attention of home economists. My thinking herein is based on two premises. First, conflict is a natural part of life. It arises when people (a) perceive their interests and goals as incompatible with and threatened by their opponents, (b) overtly express their hostile attitudes toward others or (c) pursue their self-interest in a way that harms or damages others (Kruvant, ca. 2023). Indeed, conflict is from Latin *conflictus* ‘a contest’ that unfolds in the presence of discord, disagreement, and opposing principles, attitudes, and values (Harper, 2023). In this instance, the conflict is the

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threat to home economics from contrary ideologies that are perpetuated by opponents whose interests are self-judged as incompatible with home economics best interests (McGregor, 2022).

Second, humans can react to conflict in one of two ways: they can resort to violence or nonviolence. Violence (from Latin *violare* ‘vehement violation’) (Harper, 2023) involves a destructive physical (sometimes psychological) force exerted on someone to cause harm, damage, and compliance. When confronted with violence, people either *fight* out of *anger* (strike back while suppressing fear) or *flee* out of *fear* (lie down while suppressing their anger). In either case, people are repressing strong inner emotions rather than facing them. This lets the emotions fester and simmer thus setting up future violent (unproductive) flare-ups, and the cycle of violence continues, and the conflict tends to remain unresolved (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996). The rest of the paper concerns the nonviolence response to conflict and how home economics can benefit from embracing this philosophy.

Nonviolence Philosophy

Nonviolence (a coin termed by Indian lawyer Mohandas Gandhi in 1920) is from Sanskrit *ahimsā* ‘lack of desire to harm or kill.’ It involves a different force (a strong inner force called *Satyagraha*) (to be discussed) that deals with conflict in a much more constructive manner than does violence (Nagler, 1999; Sharp, 2012). Instead of home economists perpetuating conflict by fighting an external war with those who misjudge the profession to our detriment and theirs (McGregor, 2022), nonviolence involves each individual home economist engaging their *inner conflict* about this issue, which, when resolved, yields an inner strength that she or he can draw on to exercise nonviolent strategies (right actions) (to be discussed) at the right time. “Violence is power over people; non-violence is power from within” (McGregor, 2016, p. 14).

Offering the Satyagraha using Right Actions

From a nonviolent perspective, people succeed when they experience an *inner victory* over themselves (i.e., they overcome themselves) instead of victory over someone else. This inner victory is a personal gain that no one can take away because a successful inner struggle, self-sacrifice, and learned self-discipline have led to *Satyagraha*, which is an inner power that sustains people over long periods of time (Nagler, 1999). *Satya* means Truth, and *agraha* means insisting on hanging on in the face of (holding firmly against) some injustice. *Satyagraha* thus means clinging firmly to the Truth, adhering to Truth, or relying on Truth (Naidu, 1996; Sharp, 1967). *Satyagraha* is a mental power and inner strength (positive force) that people gain from their inner struggles to overcome (a) negative emotions (e.g., greed, frustration, aggression, alienation, exclusion, or submission) and (b) automatic reactions to conflict (i.e., flight or fight due to anger or fear) (Naidu, 1996).

Thus, the objective of nonviolence is not to win over an opponent. Instead, the objective is to stop the injustice and change the situation by drawing on *Satyagraha* while using *right action* and the *right means* strategically at the *right* time (McCarthy, 1992; McReynolds, 1998). An action that is right is ethical, respectful, honourable, compassionate, and responsible (McReynolds, 1998). When engaging in right action, people are also patient, honest, conscientious, sympathetic, and they desire the welfare of all living beings. They speak and act from their Truth, which emerges from their heart (Peck, 2020; Sharp, 1967).

“With truth as its lodestar, [*Satyagraha*] never fails: it is creative nonviolence leading to a constructive transforming of relationships ... ensuring a basic restructuring of the situation which led to the conflict” (Ostergaard, 1974, p.10). Operating from a position of Truth better ensures that everyone benefits, and no legacy of bitterness is left behind. Also, solutions to conflict are more sustainable because everyone’s Truth is respected (Ostergaard, 1974).

Gandhi's notion of nonviolence thus requires rooting out violence from oneself, one's opponents, and their environment. He believed that war cannot be avoided as long as people carry seeds of violence in their heart, which lets violence grow in society, the economy, and the polity—the precursor of war (Sharp, 1967). Home economists would strive to help those oppressing them better appreciate that they harbour seeds of violence against home economics in their heart for myriad reasons (especially ideological—see McGregor, 2022). Without nurturance, seeds fail to grow. We do not want violent seeds to flourish. We want nonviolence seeds to flourish.

Any home economist seeking to grow seeds of nonviolence can draw from Gene Sharp's (1973) 198 methods of resisting violence as an automatic reaction to conflict. He organized these into six categories of nonviolent right actions: protest and persuasion, social non-cooperation, economic non-cooperation (buycotts and strikes), political non-cooperation, and nonviolent interventions. As McGregor (2016) summarized,

people can rally together in *symbolic* action, engaging in marches, pickets, sit ins, and fasting, often (but not always) while wearing ribbons, pins, carrying posters, or handing out pamphlets. [They can] also take *concrete actions*, which entail moving forward together by (a) cooperating with the good that the oppressor is doing; (b) not cooperating with the bad (by striking, disobeying curfews, refusing orders, entering illegally); (c) not cooperating as something is happening, often by obstruction and blocking power; and (d) being constructive when possible yet still eroding the oppressor's power. The latter includes community gardens, newsletters and websites, social media, blogs, and volunteering. (p. 19)

How does this work? Successful nonviolent strategies make the violent party lose their balance and footing. When they are thrown off balance, their power is temporarily diminished thus creating a space for them to hear and heed those employing nonviolence. Their heart, which has been hardened against home economics, is softened, and moved. They are thus more inclined to face any strong emotions underpinning their violent stance to the home economics conflict (namely biases, worries, fears, anxieties, blind spots, prejudice, guilt, illusions, and compulsions). With an open mind and softened heart, they can be more receptive to nonviolent, alternative messaging. There is a chance for new perspectives to emerge because the nonviolent person pushing back against the conflict situation (e.g., home economists challenging ideologies) can appeal to their opponent's humanity, conscience, and dignity (Nagler, 2014; McReynolds, 1998; Sharp, 1967; Vellacott, 2000).

Although not all battles can be won, because sometimes nothing works in these situations, people should still keep trying to apply the nonviolent philosophy because doing nothing is being complicit to violence. The search for the Truth is unending for anyone who embraces nonviolence whether their efforts succeed or not (McReynolds, 1998; Sharp, 1967). In fact, ongoing efforts to employ nonviolent strategies help build *Satyagraha*. People committed to the nonviolence philosophy learn to confront and then control their negative emotions and recognize instinctual, automatic self-preservation reactions (fight and flee). In the process, they convert and then store any energy and self-power they gained from exercising self-control, self-discipline, and self sacrifice. This instead of expending it or repressing it to let it simmer. Self-sacrifice is key to nonviolence and concerns a willingness to always engage in inner struggles to self-learn, harness this positive force, and release it in constructive ways (Nagler, 1999; 2014).

Imagine that this power source is stored in one's breast (heart and soul). When people engage in nonviolent right actions (such as those proposed by Sharp, 1973), they reach deep inside and tap into this reserve of power. This process is called "*offering the Satyagraha*," and the person

doing so is called a *satyagrahi*. They voluntarily dig deep and *offer* their Truth and inner strength to the cause (Nagler, 1999, 2014; Naidu, 1996). To reiterate, the nonviolence philosophy assumes that people succeed when they experience an *inner victory* over self. Others cannot diminish this personal gain because successful inner struggles, self-sacrifice, and learned self-discipline produce the sustaining storehouse of Satyagraha.

The process of learning to control negative emotions, so this storehouse can grow, depends on *unlearning* the basic instinct to fight or flee in the face of fear or anger (i.e., automatic violent reactions to conflict) (Nagler, 1999). This instinctual response reflects assumptions of separateness, disconnectedness, and otherness thus making room for enemies and seeing the bad or worst in people. As people practice nonviolence and unlearn (which can take years, decades even), their *reasoning* is freed up. That is, they eventually gain awareness that everything is connected thus making every person and their Truth matter. Having access to this reasoning ability helps people continue to regain control of their baser emotions and seek the Truth as they observe it despite ever-present obstacles. They move from a state of inertia (no power or action, or they use wrong action) to one of taking *right* action scaffolded by Satyagraha. They can now humanize the situation and view people as humans rather than viewing them as enemies or dehumanizing them (degrading and debasing) (Naidu, 1996).

Nonviolence Suffering and Principles

People who live the nonviolent philosophy learn to suffer for what they believe in. To suffer (from Latin *sufferre* ‘to bear’) (Harper, 2023) is to undergo, patiently endure, carry (bear), put up with, or go through such things as emotional and physical pain, discomfort, inconvenience, distress, disadvantage, a loss, a penalty, punishment, and harm—and in the extreme, death. People can avoid this suffering, if they chose not to live by nonviolent principles (see Table 1). But once these principles are internalized, and the practices of self-discipline and suffering are learned, people can use them for the rest of their life (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996).

Table 1 Comparing Nonviolent and Violent Assumptions and Principles (used with permission from McGregor, 2016)

Nonviolence Principles	Violence Principles
“Let us grow and move ahead together”—a positive-sum game (everyone wins)	“I win, you lose”—a zero-sum game (someone loses)
See people as <i>humans</i> and honor them (meaning you always have to humanize the situation)	See people as <i>the enemy</i> , then label and treat them as such (enemy is from Latin <i>inimicus</i> ‘not friend’); enables dehumanization (degrading and debasing)
Oppose and resist <i>the action</i> , program, or agenda <i>not the person</i> ; resist the sin while affirming the opponent’s integrity, capacity for growth, and their ability to examine their values and beliefs; value their Truth	Oppressor opposes <i>the person</i> and resists the sinner by demoralizing, demeaning, and marginalizing them; opponent does not value the oppressor’s Truth, their capacity for growth nor their values and beliefs
Respect the person and <i>do not harm</i> (softens anger); this approach evokes respect rather than relies on respect	Harm others (and their property) with no respect for the person (hardens anger)
Positive feelings stem from belief that we are <i>all connected</i>	Negative feelings stem from belief that we are <i>all separate</i> and disconnected

Nonviolence Principles	Violence Principles
<i>Never</i> sacrifice principles of freedom, truth, justice, dignity, peace, honor, and no harm, but <i>do</i> adapt strategies and techniques	Take a strategic approach to win, dismissing overarching principles; do whatever it takes to win
Set in <i>motion</i> forces that lead to a new equation and a new situation	Set in <i>place</i> forces that seize, crush, break, and beat down the opponent
In the end, people are liberated but friends (<i>fellowship</i>)	In the end, people are dominated, and they are not friends (enemies and adversaries)
<i>Mutual learning process for change</i> ; see life as a co-evolution toward a loving community in which everyone thrives; <i>power is shared</i> for the common good	<i>Power struggle</i> ; people see life as a clash of egos where victors make material and symbolic gains (symbolic means a visible symbol for something abstract, like reputation); oppressors resist change and strive for the status quo, which keeps them in power
<i>Success</i> is “We moved ahead together” (and did so by undermining the opponent’s sources of power and creating new webs of shared power)	<i>Success</i> is “I won” (by imposing one’s power over others while maintaining separateness); oppressors gloat, brag, and boast <i>a victory</i>
<i>Success</i> is when you <i>overcame yourself</i> ; it is an <i>inner victory</i> over self, a personal gain that no one can take away (successful inner struggle, self-sacrifice and learned self-discipline leading to Satyagraha)	<i>Success</i> is when you <i>beat someone</i> ; it is an <i>external victory</i> expressed as “I won, you lost”; however, this gain can be taken away with more force and more violence
Heal yourself <i>at the same time</i> you are trying to get the oppressor off your back, and heal them too because they are also oppressed (i.e., open their minds, so they can open their hearts)	Win the battle or the war, and <i>then</i> deal with each person (if at all); perhaps heal physical wounds but usually not spiritual or personal wounds
You and <i>me</i> against an unjust situation	You against me
Focus on eliciting <i>right action</i> (ethical, honourable, compassionate, and responsible)	Focus on overtly expressing <i>wrong</i> , non-virtuous action (unethical, dishonourable, and irresponsible)

The nonviolence philosophy is dependent on people unlearning crippling negative emotions, which can block self-work on self-discipline, the self-learning process of suffering, and self-sacrifice. These emotions thwart people getting at their own Truth and ultimately that of others (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996). Without that self-Truth, the positive emotions and positive force of Satyagraha cannot build up, which means it cannot be offered up in a conflict situation. People then fall back on violence.

In short, nonviolence is dependent on holding firmly to principles (see Table 1) while taking right actions (Sharp, 1973) at the right time. People must never waver from these principles.

“Acting with tenacity, conviction, and determination, those offering the Satyagraha never compromise on principles but they are very creative in finding new strategies and tactics if they are [initially] unsuccessful in their cause” (McGregor, 2016, p. 19).

Nonviolence No Harm and Truth

Another primary principle of nonviolence is “do no harm” to a person or their dignity under any condition or circumstances or to do the least amount of harm (Ackerman & DuVall, 2001; Nagler, 2014). In practice, nonviolent sanctions should lead to actions or consequences that can be withdrawn or mitigated with no permanent damage when a settlement is reached—the consequences are reversible (McCarthy, 1992). Right actions (i.e., the *right* means to achieve an end) depend on both (a) noninjurious strategies (do not harm the person or their dignity) and (b) not harming the opponent’s legitimate interests (their Truth). Adhering to the search for Truth (Satyagraha) and exercising the non-injury principle eventually opens (softens) the opponent’s heart (Nagler, 1999).

Indeed, the no-harm principle is tied to how the nonviolence philosophy understands Truth, specifically the Gandhian notion of Truth that is different from not being false (McReynolds, 1989; Nagler, 1999). Nonviolence assumes that all voices (everyone’s view of the Truth) are needed to find *satya* or Gandhian Truth. For Gandhi, the greater Truth is so multifaceted that one person cannot grasp it in its entirety. Everyone carries pieces of the Truth, but we all need pieces of others’ truths, so we can pursue the greater Truth. Thus, there is inherent worth in dialoguing with opponents to understand their motivations and interests—aspects of their Truth. This means they should not be harmed else aspects of their Truth may be lost to us (Ostergaard, 1974; Nagler, 1999).

What may appear as Truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker [of Truth]. Where there is honest effort [in seeking Truth], it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. ... Hence there is nothing wrong with every man [sic] following Truth according to his lights [because the seeker will know it when it is observed]. (Gandhi, 1927)

To elaborate further,

truth is determined by observation. Truth is always partial and incomplete because reality (what people observe) is always partial and incomplete. Because people see things differently, they have a different reality, meaning they have a different Truth. From a non-violent perspective, people even listen to the people they detest and hate, just so they can catch some remarks about Truth that they would have otherwise missed [in their own observations. Non-violence is a search for the Truth. This is why it is unconscionable to harm or take another person’s life]. (McGregor, 2016, p. 16)

Nonviolent Resistance

Another aspect of the core of nonviolence is drawing on Satyagraha to ensure *resistance* (from Latin *resistere* ‘stop’) (Harper, 2023) against oppressors to get them to stop doing something. Resistance is very different from aggression (i.e., attacking someone with hostile or violent intent, behaviour, or attitudes). Resistance comes into play and is led by people who object to the current situation and want to change it—make it stop. When resisting, people can engage in right actions (strategies) that aid them in some combination of (a) withstanding pressure (not buckling or backing down), (b) striving (fighting vigorously) against, (c) dissenting (withholding one’s assent) and (d) taking a stand (asserting then defending one’s position in the face of opposition) (Nagler, 1999; Sharp, 1973).

Home economists have been resisting the fallout of ideological imposition on the profession for decades. They have withstood relentless pressure, taken stands, striven against, and opposed marginalization, disrespect, belittlement, closures, and so on (McGregor, 2022; McGregor & Gentzler, 2009; Pendergast & McGregor, 2007). *But*—they were not using a nonviolent philosophy when they did this. Instead, they fought (and continue to fight) a war of attrition (i.e., a gradual wearing down through sustained attack or pressure) while viewing their opponents as enemies. They did not address the ideologies (McGregor, 2022). For clarification, an opponent is competing against you or is set against you and what you want thus creating a conflict situation (Nagler, 1999). As a reminder, conflict arises when opponents feel that their respective self-interests are incompatible.

Home economists can learn from the nonviolence philosophy. People in *resistance* mode (stopping *something*), rather than attack mode (harming *someone*), can engage in intentional acts of (a) commission or (b) omission. The former has them performing acts they normally do not do, are not expected to do, or are forbidden to do. Acts of omission pertain to right actions involving refusal to perform acts that they normally do or are legally required to do (Nagler, 1999; Sharp, 1973). To reiterate, because the profession has been engaged in a war of attrition for decades, there is little overt evidence of nonviolent resistance. They have been taking a stand by fighting battles instead of “walking a path of loving resistance” (McReynolds, 1998, para. 10). If they had walked this path, they would have hated and subsequently learned not to hate versus hating and not learning to forgive (Nagler, 1996). Their opponents thus remain their enemies at war, and the ideologies (the real culprit) go unchallenged.

Sharp (1973) further proposed that the person’s view of their opponent (positive, negative, or partner) determines their overall intent for resisting: (a) coercion, (b) conversion or (c) winning their participation. Respectively, if someone holds a negative view of their opponent (the enemy, which is not Gandhian nonviolence), they tend to use force or threats to persuade them to do something against their will. I respectfully suggest that our profession’s penchant to fight a war of attrition implies we view our opponents as *enemies* of home economics. We try to coerce, persuade, or entice them to refrain from what they are doing, so home economics is respected and resourced. But when power imbalances exist, as in the home economics conflict, this strategy can be futile—our entreaties fall on deaf ears because there is no force behind them (especially no Satyagraha Truth force).

If someone views their opponents in a positive light (a fellow human being and friend with their own Truth), nonviolent practitioners would try to convert them (turn them about) by persuading them to join their side of justice—their Truth. What if we changed our tactic and viewed others as potential friends of home economics who need persuading of our Truth—how we know and message home economics and its potential? The attrition war per se would eventually end if we engaged in right action strategies to bolster our resistance to home economics being undervalued (underestimated) and devalued (depreciated). We could use nonviolence principles and right actions to address the “dismissal of (unworthy of consideration), disregard for (lack of attention), and disrespect for (lack of esteem and recognition) home economics” (McGregor, 2022, p. 40). Those oppressing us would eventually stand in a new Truth that better aligns with the profession’s Truth because we succeeded in softening their heart and opening their mind to our view (Truth) of home economics (Nagler, 1999).

That said, I still maintain that revealing underlying ideologies that inform erroneous perceptions of home economics, thus perpetuating the current untenable injustice and conflict situation, is a timely, strategic right action (McGregor, 2022). I thereby highly recommend that we ultimately opt for the third way of resisting—our *intent* would be to convince people holding counterintuitive ideologies to partner with us and take part in a joint effort to search for a common, *shared* Truth about home economics (Sharp, 1973). This could be a way out of this

prolonged conflict situation, which currently exists because those involved perceive that respective, competing interests and concerns, and how to address them, are incompatible.

Anticipating pushback, it is worth noting that using nonviolence is not a sign of weakness. It is *not* the same thing as passivity, which is the choice to do nothing (Ackerman & DuVall, 2001). Instead, using “nonviolence requires the greatest courage [and can] score resounding success” (Nagler, 1999, p. 32). “Nonviolence always works. Violence always fails. Violence always leads to further violence ...; nonviolence always leads to peace and reconciliation [and justice]” (Nagler, 1999, p. 30).

And home economics needs justice. It continues to experience unjust and unfair treatment and actions against it, and relentless oppression and marginalization. Its dignity, reputation, and rights as a discipline and profession are repeatedly violated at great expense. I maintain that the culprit is overarching ideologies rather than the people acting under their influence (McGregor, 2022). From a nonviolence stance, by exposing the ideologies, we expose the oppression. Once exposed, the oppression can be challenged while working hand in hand with our opponents. A greater *shared* Truth about home economics can ultimately be observed. Everyone wins.


Conclusion

Although practicing from a nonviolent perspective takes a very long time to achieve, if individual home economists could learn self-sacrifice and self-discipline (i.e., harness and master their negative emotions toward their opponents), so they can create a storehouse of positive, inner energy for strategic release (Satyagraha), the profession could collectively build up steadfast resistance and cultivate relentless persistence. Indeed, because this process “does not depend on the opponent—it’s entirely ‘proactive’—it can go on constantly” (Nagler, 1999, p. 18). This way, home economists can stay the course until the conflict situation is changed, so everyone benefits, and justice is served.

“One outstanding satyagrahi will attract others [and people will eventually follow] because all are drawn irresistibly to the truth” (Nagler, 1999, p. 20). Consider this article as the first step along this journey. Both the growing cadre of home economists practicing the nonviolence philosophy and their opponents would eventually grow and learn how to move ahead together against an unjust situation. And home economics would finally find long overdue justice.

Biography

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